



Exercise 4.9

Working with Conflict



This exercise gives your participants a chance to demonstrate strategies they could use to reduce or resolve a conflict. You can use the scenario cards provided here or make up new scenarios to reflect the situations in your region. This exercise complements the information in **Module 3** because discussions about community planning can create conflict. You may wish to pair this with **Exercise 3.3: Creating a Statement** and **Exercise 3.8: Role-Playing Development Decisions**.

You can also use the scenarios in **Exercise 1.6: What Would You Do?** for this discussion.

Objective: Participants will explore the interests that underlie conflicts and suggest strategies to move parties toward common ground.

Materials:

Handout 1: Scenario Cards
Fact Sheet 4.7: Addressing Misconceptions About Wildland-Urban Interface Issues
Fact Sheet 4.8: Communication Challenges—When People Will Not Agree
Fact Sheet 4.9: Reducing Conflict
Presentation 4.3

Time: 45 minutes

1. Use **Fact Sheets 4.8: Communication Challenges—When People Will Not Agree** and **4.9: Reducing Conflict** and **Presentation 4.3** to explain that conflict in the wildland-urban interface is inevitable. Investments are significant, perspectives are varied, and some people have the skills and time to make their views known. What is the natural resource agency's role in such conflicts? In some cases, resource professionals can sit on neutral middle ground, providing information to all parties. In other cases, however, agency staff are in the middle of conflict, legally bound to represent a position that others do not agree with.
2. If you have not already explored misconceptions, you might use **Fact Sheet 4.7: Addressing Misconceptions About Wildland-Urban Interface Issues** to explain that some conflicts are due to misunderstandings that may be difficult to change. The fact sheet provides some strategies for explaining information when people just don't understand.
3. After an introduction to conflict, you may wish to generate a discussion about strategies that could help to resolve conflicts. Be sure to introduce the points in **Fact Sheet 4.9** if they are not brought up by participants.
4. Select the scenario card or cards (see *Handout 1* or the *Handouts* in **Exercise 1.6**) that are most appropriate for your region and duplicate them to create one per person. Form small groups

of 3 to 5 participants and ask them to discuss their scenario. Make it clear that they can use their imagination and experience to fill out the details of these sketchy descriptions. Their tasks are to answer the following questions:

- What are the positions of the parties involved?
- What are the interests of the parties involved?
- What could everyone agree on?
- What strategies could a natural resource professional use to assist in the resolution of this conflict?

Summary

Conflict resolution can be a difficult process, but conflict prevention may be more achievable. Partnerships with other agencies, town councils, citizen groups, and businesses can help build relationships that may help people resolve misunderstandings before they escalate to conflict situations. Encourage participants to discuss examples they know of such partnerships and the strategies others have used to reduce or resolve conflicts.

Handout 1: Scenario Cards



1. Your county is going through a comprehensive planning process. An urban services line on the map indicates where sewer and water lines will be extended for concentrated development (inside the line) and where it won't. The landowners outside the line believe they will not be able to sell their lands for suburban development; this represents a significant loss of potential income. Those in favor of the line believe protecting open space is key to maintaining an attractive community. Assume the line is also serving to protect natural resources and ecosystem services from development. How do you balance private property rights with resource protection?



2. A developer proposes to build a large subdivision in an area that had been zoned one house per five acres. He is requesting a change in the zoning to allow four houses per acre and plans to create a "conservation subdivision" with some affordable housing. Those who already live in the area are furious with their loss of open space and the potential of the new community to attract those with less wealth. Farmers in the area are beginning to realize that they will not be able to farm much longer no matter what happens. Creating more housing and more affordable housing is important to the larger community. Your agency has been dragged in to this by both sides who see their solution as "good for natural resources."



3. A landowner wishes to cut a loblolly pine plantation. The only access she has to her property is through a subdivision. She has offered to repave the road if the logging trucks crack the pavement, but the residents are opposed to the harvest. They chose to live there because they like the trees. Both sides have asked the state forestry agency to help them win this conflict.



4. A state park wishes to conduct a prescribed burn on a natural area of the park that borders a subdivision of mobile homes, which would be in extreme danger if a wildfire developed. The park recognizes that the best way to prevent a catastrophe is conduct a prescribed burn before the fuel loads become too great. The residents do not understand the ecological value of a prescribed fire and are concerned about an escape. They are afraid and very vocal. Their representative on the City Council has privately insinuated that you are trying to make a poor, minority community move elsewhere.